

The Tide

by chi-of-ink

Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Angst, Family

Language: English

Characters: Hiccup, Stoick, Valhallarama

Status: Completed

Published: 2013-05-11 23:50:59

Updated: 2013-05-11 23:50:59

Packaged: 2016-04-26 15:04:58

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,299

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: There was a point upon the island of Berk where any newborn runts were cast away to the sea. Hiccup played there sometimes, five years old totally ignorant of what had almost been his grave.

The Tide

For those who have not read the books, there is a custom within book canon that underweight infants are to be cast away for 'fate' to deal with. Hiccup was never tested, since Stoick and Val wanted their son too badly to throw him in the ocean. :,)

This is my experimental attempt to slip that element into movie canon.

* * *

><p>The Tide<p>

* * *

><p>Even in her wrinkled old arms, their son looked impossibly small. He slept without a sound, one tiny fist tucked under his chin. Stoick stared at his curled fingers, each in miniature, as if they belonged to a doll.<p>

He didn't miss the way the Naming Dame wrinkled her nose as she weighed him in her arms. It was brief, a flickering grimace, but Stoick had seen such looks on Vikings who were offered rotting fish, and both he and Valhallarama immediately drew themselves tall with indignation.

"This is a runt." she pronounced, that look of apologetic respect firmly back in place again. "A Hiccup." She fixed her stormy eyes on the infant, studying the round face, the tiny shape of him lost in

too-big swaddling. "Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third."

His wife looked at him solemnly, her lips pressed into a thin line, but Stoick could barely think. He hadn't heard his son's name, hadn't even processed the naming as over. Only one word broke through, and it was that one word that played again and again in his taxed brain until he bristled and shook and with every last molecule of his being forced himself not to shout.

"'Only the strong can belong'," the Naming Dame quoted wisely. "Weakness will only drag us down. Runts are bad luck. Parasites. A tumor in the flesh of an otherwise healthy tribe...I recommend, cut it out...you'll agree, the only way to treat a tumor is to cut it out..."

"'It?" Stoick heard his wife repeat tremulously. The Naming Dame tilted her jaw, considering.

And then she gestured with her bony white fingers to their sleeping baby.

* * *

><p>"She's wrong!" Stoick burst at once when they had returned to the quiet safety of their home. "It's a mistake! My son? A - a
r..." the word was like acid on his tongue.

"He's not a _runt_," Valhallarama said fiercely, her eyes burning like hearth-coals. "He's a Horrendous Haddock."

Stoick nodded stubbornly, repeatedly. They had wanted a child so badly, he and Valhallarama. They had waited for years, equally stubborn, never allowing themselves to think that maybe it was all in vain. He remembered the way Valhallarama had glowed at the news. The cheers when their baby was born: Gobber, downing glasses and singing off-key. Spitelout clapping him on the back in good-heartedly.

Hiccup had green eyes speckled with gold, like an oak tree needled in the sun. They were Stoick's eyes exactly. His smile was a crooked loop, all bright and open and curious: his mother's rare grin in miniature. After so many long, frustrating years of waiting, and their son was finally here. He had a _heartbeat_. He had a _name_.

They couldn't just throw him away.

* * *

><p>Hiccup was two and a half years old when Valhallarama died.<p>

He was too young to remember the incident, but Stoick remembered every vivid, bloodstained second. His son, drawn by the lights, the activity, the warsong cries of his parents and village, too innocent or too curious to stay out of the battlefield. Valhallarama, lit up by the light of several Monstrous Nightmare's sticky fire, fighting with stony fierceness at his side. She pushed him hard in the direction of their wandering son, her eyes wide and wild, teeth bared - "***_Go!_**"

Hiccup gave a breathy laugh when Stoick yanked him off the ground. He had to tuck the squirming, kicking toddler against his chest, tight enough to bruise as Hiccup pressed his chin over the plate of his shoulder and gasped in his reedy voice, "Mom!"

Thunk, thunk. The screech of dragons. _Back inside_, Stoick thought, _just get back inside-_

Valhallarama's hammer made a clear crackling noise as it splintered bone, but the sound of bubbling fire was twice as sharp. Hiccup 'ooo'ed and 'ahh'ed in ignorant awe, his tiny fists curling in the fur of his father's cloak.

(_runts are bad luck, she had warned_)

Stoick forced the Hel-damned name from his head stubbornly as soon as it began to form. In the climbing distance between them, he could no longer hear his wife's battle cry.

He would have liked to fight with her, to have that last chance. He would have liked to say goodbye. There was purpose and nobility in protecting their son, of course, and it's what Val would have wanted. She wasn't the first to die, and as far as deaths went, her's was not the least favorable, either.

But Stoick had raged for weeks, drinking too heavily with Gobber, quicker to anger than ever before. He salvaged what he could from her body and concentrated his grief into war. In the following raids, he was more reckless and deadly than ever.

As for Hiccup, he had cried when he first seemed to be grasping the fact that his mother would not be returning. Gobber was better with the little one - he had a knack for patience, something Stoick found increasingly difficult to maintain - but when it was just the two of them, Stoick found the boy impossible. His grief could stretch out and burn like a battleground of it's own, but Hiccup's wet eyes were asking for comfort, and try as he might, Stoick could never seem to find the proper words.

The misery, that rare attempt at softness, soon turned to frustration.

In the end, it was Val's words he borrowed, and Hiccup got used to them over the weeks of his father's mourning, dodging them like wayward arrows and hiding from the echo of them within the safety of his room, or the smithy, or the tangled woods off the village crest - "Go. _Go._ **_Go!_**"

* * *

><p>They had never so much as breathed the word 'runt' to another living soul. Their decision to keep Hiccup was well-guarded, and with Valhallarama's death, only Stoick remained knowing.<p>

Still, the secret was not easily forgotten.

There was a point upon the island of Berk where any newborn runts were cast away to the sea, left to the hands of fate. Most likely, they were dinner for dragons, or another missing soul for the endless

ocean to erase. The cliff itself was low, the tide raging constantly, heaving in and out like a endlessly repeating circle.

Hiccup played there sometimes, five years old totally ignorant of what had almost been his grave. His hair was brighter then, a red-brown that would eventually darken to chestnut, with the salty ocean wind tugging it wild in every direction.

Once icy afternoon, the tide nearly succeeded in pulling him out entirely. Spitelout's son, Snotlout (who had been deemed a suitable playmate for the chief's son but coincidentally only seemed to make Hiccup shrink away instead of toughen up,) had come running for help, white-faced and panicking. The next thing he saw before instinct kicked in was his son's distant shape struggling to keep above the rolling waves.

Stoick had scolded him fiercely after that particular rescue, an unwelcome lump rising in his throat as he shouted about following orders, tempting fate, and at least knowing how to swim first. All the while, Hiccup sat miserably on the sands waiting for his turn to speak, soaked to the bone and trembling violently.

"I c-c-can s-swim, Dad." he whined, teeth chattering. "I had a p-plan-"

"ENOUGH," Stoick boomed, and as usual when his shouting reached a peak, the conversation halted to an end. Hiccup shut his mouth and stared furiously at his bare feet. Stoick gritted his teeth and stared furiously down at Hiccup. A scarce distance away, the tide moaned and sighed.

Neither of them understood, really, just how close they had come.

* * *

><p>It wasn't long after the casting-point incident that one of the younger girls, Astrid, lost her father in a raid. Much like Stoick, her grief transformed into fury. Hiccup went from watching her curiously from a distance to scurrying out of her way like a skittish animal on every occasion.<p>

She was a striking girl, white-blond with eyes like a hawk. Hiccup was not the first to notice her, but he was the quickest to give in when she showed her teeth (for her age, she was really quite handy with a dagger.) But Astrid tended to forgo playtime in favor of more serious, private 'training.' Hiccup saw less and less of her growing up on Berk, and more and more of the rowdier, wilder children. Like Snotlout, who tried to start new wrestling matches every few minutes. And the twins, who were eager to join in and compile a victory, kicking up dust, laughing and shoving until they seemed nothing more than a pile of limbs and braids.

Good old-fashioned healthy roughhousing.

Young and over-eager, they played a game of chase, 'hunters and dragons'. Hiccup was the designated 'dragon.' He climbed up to the dinner table that afternoon sporting fresh bruises and dirt, smiling in a helpless, pleading way that never failed to tighten muscles in Stoick's jaw.

"Where's your shield?"

"Lost it." Hiccup met his father's disappointed scowl and immediately lowered his eyes to pick at his cold dinner instead. There was a yellowish bruise on his temple, just beside his eye. "Lost it in battle." he corrected as an afterthought, trying to puff out his little chest to accommodate.

Stoick grunted. Hiccup picked up a mug with both hands to hide his face behind it awkwardly as he drank. Even the cup looked oversized in his grip. There were dark bruises circling his skinny wrists, standing out on the pale skin like manacles.

"But if it were a real dragon," Hiccup murmured sneakily, "I'd have won. I made this whistle out of scrap metal, and dragons can't stand the noise."

For Thor's sake... "Son, that's not how you kill a dragon."

"But nobody's ever tried it, right? So maybe it will-"

"Now an axe, or hammer, that's the way to get it bleeding!-"

"-and test it on, because there's certain sounds that-"

"-even a shield would be-"

Hiccup's face went pink at the mention. "That's not - Dad, they weren't playing fair!"

"Playing fair!" Stoick repeated, and laughed loudly as if this were a particularly good joke. "Son, a Viking doesn't 'play fair'! Do you think the devils would leave their raids in pieces if we played fair?"

Hiccup faltered, a nervous smile lighting his face in a lopsided arc. So much like Valhallarama's smile, it was - granted, his was smaller, shyer, more innocent looking with the missing teeth and rounded cheeks of a seven year old. But to Stoick, it was like a ghost in the room.

He set down his mug heavily.

"If you'd just..." Hiccup started again, voice high.

"No." Stoick said, and when the boy opened his mouth again, he pointed gruffly at his untouched plate. "Eat your salmon. You have growing to do."

Hiccup went limp, like a puppet with it's strings cut.

They ate in silence.

* * *

><p>Word of the failed attempts at Gobber's smithy got back to him over the months: Hiccup's whistle, which created absolutely no noise at all and was very easily tossed back into the scrap heap. A leather 'protective mask' which looked terrible for visibility, despite Hiccup's claims about reduced burns. A shoddy launch for steel

arrows, which Gobber insisted be melted down after it nearly took out his eye.<p>

Stoick scowled and shook his head.

"Give it a chance!" Hiccup insisted. _Give ME a chance._

Why was it that his father would _only ever_ be impressed with the loudest, the strongest, the very best?

* * *

><p>Hiccup learned to spend more time with Fishlegs, one of the friendlier children. The older boy's size made him nervous at first, but Fishlegs was all about facts and tactics and far less concerned with physical intimidation. Sometimes, the conversations were actually pleasant.<p>

Even so, Hiccup remained the smallest child, a scrawny outsider among the rough, confident bunch. Astrid, determined to show her skill, turned up more and more, forcing her way into the spotlight until she was easily the most skilled of the pack.

"She's the _alpha_," Fishlegs explained in a whisper. "Snotlout doesn't come close."

He watched her sometimes, enviously: the very best warrior.

* * *

><p>Conversations were few and far-between in the Haddock house. Eye-contact alone seemed a chore.<p>

So he didn't know what possessed him to want to start _this_ particular conversation, especially considering the taboo that had sprung about around it.

Maybe it was Astrid, and the reverent way she would hold her dead father's axe, a saddened respect she had never adopted for any of her others weapons. It was possible something of his mother's was left behind - a helmet, maybe, or a hammer - but the likelihood of him lifting one of Valhallarama's hammers was in the negatives...so there was that.

But one day, when his father seemed in a good enough mood, Hiccup took a breath and blurted out, "I don't really remember her."

Confused silence met him. Hiccup cleared his throat, tried to sound casual. "You know, uh...Mom." he embellished.

"Ah." Stoick said softly, blinking into the fireplace. To Hiccup's surprise, there was a fond smile on his face, bittersweet. "Ah, son. You were young."

"Was she anything like me?" he ventured, hopefully, and Stoick gave a warm laugh, his smile growing at the memory. "No, no!" he said heartily, "She was nothing like you! Once, your mother-"

But Hiccup felt something tug at his gut, an haze that prickled over

his skin like a winter chill, and everything his father said from that point on seemed lost in that coldness. He wanted to remember her, her face, the sound of her voice. But more and more he was beginning to suspect there was no connection, just as he and his father could not be more different. It was him after all, an outsider from the village, a fluke within his own family.

Stoick's smile said it all: how wonderful it was, to be nothing like him.

* * *

><p>"Get back inside," Gobber hollered, seizing him by the collar. A metal hook hand snapped back around his vest as a building tsunami of a screech mounted above them. He gasped as Gobber pressed him down hurriedly, debris flying over their heads in time with the village's warning cries of "Night Fury!"

"Night Fury!" it echoed around the burning town like a death toll. "Night Fury, get down!"

He watched it sometimes, longingly: the very best kill.

* * *

><p>Thirteen years old, and Hiccup's shivers went bone-deep, a coldness he had not felt since his father pulled him gasping from the rolling tide as a child.<p>

Fate itself was like the tide, in a way. Twisting and turning, looping in an endless current, impossible to stop until you came crashing around in an inevitable full circle.

I'm going to cut out your heart, Hiccup thought, desperately, because he knew that nothing else would do. He had never considered, until then, that following the Viking way might _not_ fix everything. He had never considered the fact that he had never had a genuine conversation with Astrid, never even shared her interests. Never imagined just how it would feel to kill the prize he had longed to show off for his father - the breaking of bone, puncturing thrust of sharp steel, the gush of warm blood that Vikings welcomed as if it were some savage baptism.

Funny, how the things you want and the things you _think you want_ can prove to be two very different worlds.

* * *

><p>His father was the last thing Hiccup wanted to dwell on when he was safely hidden at the Cove. But the thought crept up, unwelcome, as he caught sight of his reflection in the stillness of the lake.<p>

Gangly, short, freshly bruised from his tangle with the over-eager twins at practice earlier. He hated his slight frame, the hollow face, how easy it was to count every protruding bone. Frail as always, even more obviously without the fur vest to drown in. A strong wind could snap him in halves. Typical.

I'm going to cut out your heart and take it to my father, he

thought dryly at the Viking staring back at him, but the poor joke fell flat in his head and was met instead with a particularly vivid image that made bile rise in his throat. He felt sick, suddenly and guiltily, the lake water blinking in and out of view.

Toothless cooed at him questioningly some distance away. A moment later, Hiccup found himself swept under the wing of a mothering dragon.

"Toothless - eww, stop!" he groaned laughingly as the Night Fury licked his cheek with a broad, slobbery tongue, as if trying to make him presentable. He settled against the dragon in defeat, letting himself be subdued by the sluggish heat of a summer sun.

Stoick would be furious...Hiccup pushed the thought away, unwilling to face the horrible thoughts that would doubtlessly follow. Stoick was always furious, he reasoned coldly.

Toothless's scales were cool, silver-slick and inky. The leathery roughness of his wings was an embrace entirely foreign, gentle but strong, and so very alive. Hiccup traced the shape of them sleepily along the inside of his wrist, cheek tucked against the soft spot just below the dragon's ear. Every purr reverberated through his skin like a lullaby.

Well, we all have our secrets, he thought, resigned.

* * *

><p>Hiccup asked less questions, now. Stoick approved of that much, at least - less talk, more show. It had always worked well for him, before (though to be fair, he had always had a great deal more to show than Hiccup ever did, and far much less to say.)<p>

He found his son dozing over a barely-touched plate of Icelandic cod one night and began to reach with one beefy hand to shake him back awake. The sight itself was disgracefully cozy. Collapsed at the table at swimming in his too-big furs, Hiccup looked twice as vulnerable without the wake of personality animating his thin face.

But it was his son's hands that caused him to hesitate - the skinny fingers curled in sleep, tucked unconsciously under his chin. He slept the same way he did as an infant, all pressed close as if huddling for warmth and resembling nothing more than a bundle of sticks concealed in cloth.

The naming ceremony swam unwillingly back into mind, and with it, Valhallarama's words.

Not a runt, he recited again, and the fierceness of which she had spoken burned in his memory like dragon's fire. _A Horrendous Haddock._

Gobber liked to say he was too over-protective, and maybe that had some merit after all, because he never told Hiccup about that shameful name. And ever cloaked within his shadow, Hiccup never knew to ask.

Good. Stoick liked it that way. Hiccup may be older now, but the tide

was still too close for his liking.

And we all have our secrets, after all.

End
file.